

THE HISTORY OF MARTHA BROWN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The history of Martha Brown United Methodist Church is filled with interesting facts, notable achievements, sacrificial service and dedicated commitment to God. Truly, we have a great and inspiring heritage.

Our roots go back to 1892 when East Atlanta was a little community of about 250 people. Atlanta, at that time, was a growing young city of 65,000. In the spring of 1892, a group of spiritual minded people in the East Atlanta area who had been meeting together for Sunday School, had a series of revival services under the leadership of Rev. W. B. Shea. Truly the Holy Spirit must have been present at those meetings for the decision was made to organize a church to be known as the East Atlanta Methodist Church. There were 18 Charter members--ten men and eight women. They were Mr. and Mrs. I. F. Bowden, Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Douglas, Mr. L. P. Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Gregory, Miss Eufala Gregory, Miss Maude Gregory, Mr. Willard Gregory, Mr. D. P. Marbut, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Johns, Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Marbut, Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Marbut and Mr. L. L. Marbut. For two years this group met in a house on Flat Shoals Avenue across from where the library is now located. In 1894 the church moved to the school house which was located at the triangle of Haas Avenue and Granberry Avenue, which is now called Metropolitan Place. Services were held monthly in the school house for four years before a church building could be constructed.

In 1894, Mr. J. T. Wellham donated a lot on the corner of Metropolitan Avenue and Metropolitan Place for a new church. Construction of the church could not be started until 1896 and it was 1898 before the church was completed. There were 60 members on roll at this time. Sunday School was held every Sunday but church services were held monthly until 1910 when the church became a full time church with preaching every Sunday.

In 1904, the Parsonage Aid Society was organized with 18 members. Minutes from these early meetings reveal the faithfulness, the vision and Christian concern and love which these women felt for God and their neighbors.

In April, 1909, the dream of a parsonage became a reality and Rev. Olin King and his family moved into the comfortable two-story frame house located on Metropolitan Avenue next door to where the Post Office now stands.

The next eight years was a period of real growth in membership, in spiritual maturity and in the development of a well-rounded church program. Mrs. L. V. Kennerly organized the Wesley Class Sunday School for young adults, and a Young Matrons Class and a Men's Bible Class were started.

Interest in the missionary program was increased through the Woman's Missionary Society and a children's Missionary Society which was organized by Mrs. Paul West.

As the church grew, it became evident that a larger building would soon be necessary. In 1914, a lot was donated by Mr. J. F. Brown on the corner of Metropolitan and Moreland Avenue and plans were made for a beautiful new brick sanctuary. However, these were war years and times were hard. It took a lot of planning, barbecues, ice cream suppers and prayer to finally finish the building. The first meeting was held in the new building in April 1918, with Rev. J. O. Brand, Pastor, in charge. At the suggestion of Dr. E. F. Fincher, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the name of the church was changed to Martha Brown Memorial in honor of the deceased wife of Mr. Brown.

During the next seven years, Martha Brown Church took its place as a leader unafraid to speak out for the right in a fast growing community. An Epworth League was organized and became one of the largest and most active groups in the city.

In 1926 the church indebtedness was paid off but the tremendous growth of the Sunday School presented a need for more classrooms. In 1928 a new one-story \$25,000.00 Sunday School Annex was completed next to the church on Moreland Avenue and in 1929 the second story was built at a cost of \$26,000.00. The church continued to grow but there was a continuous struggle during these depression years to pay for this building. Though money was scarce, Christian courage, faithfulness to duty and trust in God was much in evidence. The mortgage was finally burned in 1943, under the pastorate of Rev. Horace Smith.

The years from 1943 to 1952 were years of expansion. In 1946, three lots across from the church on the corner of Metropolitan and Moreland Avenue were bought for a

new parsonage. A fourth lot was given by Mr. and Mrs. Harland Dodson in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Beddingfield and Mr. and Mrs. Dodson. The parsonage was designed and built under the supervision of the pastor, Rev. Buren W. Hancock and was completed in January, 1947. At the completion of the work, the entire cost of the house had been met. Rev. Hancock served at Martha Brown for nine years--longer than any other minister. 702 members were added to the church from 1943 to 1948.

In 1949, the church purchased a vacant lot and a dwelling next door to the Educational Annex. The house was moved to the vacant lot, painted, reconditioned, re-decorated and leased to a kindergarten nursery. In 1951, a new Educational Unit was built under the personal supervision of Mr. John T. Butler, one of our members.

Rev. Gordon Thompson inaugurated the Loyalty Dinners for making our pledges and our budget increased \$54,000.00 over a period of three years. We gave 25% of our budget to World Service, leading all Methodism in the percentage of its budget giving for this cause. In 1955 we gave our Scout hut and property on Eastland Road to help start a new congregation. Many of our members in the Eastland Road vicinity transferred from Martha Brown to help in the new church. One of our own boys, Rev. Bill Floyd, was the first minister.

Mary Katherine Thompson, youngest daughter of the Gordon Thompsons, was the first baby to born to a pastor while serving our church.

During the pastorate of Rev. Dumas Shelnut, who came to us in 1956, the church continued to grow and prosper. A pledge of \$25,000.00 was made and paid to Georgia Methodist Colleges, financial support was given Hoyt Oliver, short term Missionary to Korea, the church and educational building were air-conditioned, contract for a 3-Manual Reuter Organ was let and a new parsonage on Greenleaf Road was purchased. John Lassiter became the first full-time Director of Religious Education. Our Golden Age Club, which is one of the largest and most active in the Conference, was organized during this period.

During the ministry of Dr. J. Walker Chidsey, the Church Districts were changed and we were transferred from the Atlanta East District to the Atlanta-Decatur-Oxford District. Also, our neighborhood began to change and new ways of reaching and

ministering to the community had to be tried. Were tops in members of the District \$10.00 Club which helped new churches in our District get started.

Our 75th Anniversary year was celebrated throughout 1967-68 with many special events under the leadership of our pastor, Rev. Marion Sherrill. The year ended with the presentation of a pageant and the dedication of our church plant which was completely free from all indebtedness. The value of the building, equipment and land was estimated at \$565,641.00, the parsonage and furniture, \$30,250.00, and cash and other properties and bonds \$31,017.00. The Church Library was officially opened and a new study for the Pastor was completed and furnished. A new choir room was completed with risers, cabinets for robes, files for music and a new piano.

1970 brought many changes to the neighborhood surrounding Martha Brown Church and many families moved out into the suburbs. This caused a decline in membership and attendance but also offered new challenges for ministry. Under the leadership of our Pastor, Rev. Norton Campbell, and the help of our Associate Ministers, Dr. J. W. Veatch and Rev. Ralph Hawkins, many new opportunities for service and spiritual growth were started. A church bus was purchased, a tutoring program offered, Faith Action Week-end held and a recreation program carried on for children in the community. Realizing the need for housing for the elderly in the neighborhood, Rev. Campbell helped to bring about the construction of Branan Towers, a high-rise apartment built by Wesley Homes Association. The twelve story building consisting of 142 units and 82 parking spaces provide homes for many of our members as well as elderly from other sections of the city. It also presents Martha Brown with a new ministry and new opportunities for service. Many residents of the Towers have become valuable members of our Church family.

Under the leadership of Rev. Andrew J. Peters, Minister, and Rev. B. W. Hancock, Associate Minister, the church is constantly trying to capture the vision of what our mission is in a community which changes from day to day. A very meaningful ministry to the elderly is carried on and Martha Brown continues to be a loving, caring fellowship with active members from all sections of the city. In 1977, we were transferred to the Atlanta-Chamblee District where we have been a leader in giving to Wesley Homes, Methodist Children's Home (we are in the top 25 in North Ga. Conference) and the \$10.00

Club. Our members also give many hours of volunteer service at Branan Towers.

A new telephone ministry started in 1977 offers prayers and encouragement for anyone who wishes to call.

We are grateful for the faith and sacrifice of those who have walked before us and we pray that God will help us to accept the challenge that is ours today as we strive to witness and serve in our changing world.